OPINION

BY RAFIA ZAKARIA

Mad for Mamdani

THE victory was not entirely unexpected but it was historic. For a while, the polls had shown that Zohran Mamdani, the immigrant Muslim of South Asian origin, was leading in the polls for New York City mayor. But it was not entirely guaranteed as pundits predicted that a larger-than-usual turnout of older voters who favoured Andrew Cuomo could cause an upset. That upset never came and on the night of Nov 4, America's largest city elected a Muslim mayor for the first time.

For Democrats, particularly progressive Democrats, who had balked at their party's tacit support for the genocide in Gaza, its lack of action over ICE raids, and lack of real solutions to inflation, the victory was a vindication. In Mamdani — against whom more than 20 billionaires put up millions of dollars — they could finally show where the energy of the party lay. Gen Z turned out in droves to support and vote for him. Here, finally after years of centrist fakes favoured by the likes of Hillary Clinton and Chuck Schumer, was someone who spoke the language of party voters. The margin of his victory shows how wrong the Democratic establishment had been.

The real story is also one of immigrants and of Muslims. New York is the city burdened with the memory of 9/11, which both the Republicans and the Democrats used to start and fund wars everywhere, thus triggering the age of Islamophobia. For over two decades, the memory of 9/11 has been used by politicians in NYC to justify racial profiling and the open targeting of Muslims or even anyone who 'looks' like one. Dubious security rationales and unsubstantiated 'possibilities' of attacks were used to terrify Muslim men and women. FBI and NYPD agents were sent to infiltrate mosques; Muslims were often coerced into informing on other Muslims even when there was nothing to inform on. Plans to build a mosque were met with vitriolic Islamophobia, including by Jewish-American groups in the city who used 9/11 to institutionalise the marginalisation of Muslims.

This leads to another facet of Mamdani's win. NYC is the most Jewish city in the world outside of Israel. Many might have thought that in the shadow of the Gaza genocide and Mamdani's open support for the Palestinians, such a victory was not possible. However, while large numbers in the Jewish community voted against him — exit polls showed Russian Jews had been especially mobilised against Mamdani — a decent number of young American Jews voted for him. Unlike older American Jews, most of whom tend to be Zionists and feel that criticism of Israel is antisemitism, younger American Jews have a more nuanced view.

This is likely to be very concerning to Israel whose lobby AIPAC funds both Republican and Democratic candidates in the US in exchange for their support. In the mayoral debate for NYC, Mamdani was the only candidate who said he was not interested in taking a trip to Israel and would rather stay in NYC. He was criticised by the other candidates who doubled down on him, but he remained firm. He is also the man who won. This is likely to worry lobbyists who may wonder if politicians realise that Americans are quite exhausted with their politicians supporting Israel while they cannot afford rent or food.

Beyond NYC, Democrats won with big margins, which is being seen as a clear preview of what midterm elections in the US are likely to serve up next year. Voters voted against the Republicans and by default the Trump agenda by notable margins; even lacklustre Democratic candidates managed to win. This is welcome news for everyone in America who has been watching the gutting of the government that has been underway since the beginning of this year. Usually, presidents have a bit more time before the public tires of them. Not so this time.

> The real story is also one of immigrants and of Muslims.

As for immigrants and Muslims, the news was good from places beyond NYC as well. Virginia elected Indian American Ghazala Hashmi as their first Muslim American woman lieutenant governor; Muslims were elected as mayor of Dearborn, Michigan and Dearborn Heights.

Zohran Mamdani was nine years old when the events of 9/11 happened. His Oscar-nominated filmmaker mother Mira Nair, who is married to the well-known postcolonial scholar Mahmood Mamdani, likely never imagined that the grade schooler, who was a Muslim kid in a city that had begun to grow wary of Muslims overnight, would go on to become the youngest mayor of New York City in 100 years. But miracles do happen and the churn of history means that the outcast can be reborn as a leader in the same lifetime. Zohran Mamdani's story is a lesson and an inspiration to all those who doubted the possibility of better times. ■

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BY AMMAR QASEEM

Next energy revolution

PAKISTAN is in the midst of a people-led energy revolution. As of August 2025, the country has imported 49.7 GW of solar panels, a figure that now surpasses the on-grid installed capacity. Driven by increasing electricity prices, every day more of these panels are being installed on rooftops across urban neighbourhoods, industrial zones, and rural areas.

While these solar installations have drastically advanced Pakistan's renewable energy portfolio and brought it to the global spotlight, they have also reduced electricity off-take from the national grid, shifting the burden of capacity payments from expensive power plants to the remaining consumers. As a result, tariffs have increased further, prompting more consumers to leave the grid. A vicious cycle has thus been set up.

The implications of this cycle extend beyond the grid as well, as its benefits are not shared equally across society. The solar revolution has allowed middle- and upper-class consumers to enjoy cheap electricity while the economically downtrodden are left to bear the burden of previous electricity contracts, many of which were undertaken in the first place to meet the former's high consumption peaks, particularly from air conditioning loads.

The way forward, however, does not lie in the discouragement of rooftop solar, but in its wholehearted embrace. Far from being a threat, distributed solar can become the foundation of Pakistan's energy transition — if we reimagine how the grid is managed. The shift needed is conceptual. The grid must move from being a one-way delivery system to a dynamic platform that intelligently coordinates millions of distributed solar resources. This requires a different kind of infrastructure — not poles and wires, but digital control, market signals and flexible assets which can coordinate effectively. Such a set-up is called a virtual power plant (VPP).

A VPP is an aggregation of distributed energy resources — such as solar panels, batteries, electric vehicles, and smart appliances — remotely managed through an energy management system to act like a single power plant. It monitors generation, storage, and consumption in real time and optimises the collective output by sending control signals to charge, discharge or curtail resources in response to grid conditions and market prices. In doing so, VPPs provide capacity, energy and ancillary services, ease pressure on transmission and distribution networks, support renewable integration, cut reliance on fossil fuels and allow consumers to actively participate in energy markets while gaining financial benefits.

For Pakistan, which already has one of the highest growth rates in rooftop solar globally, the conditions for VPPs are ripe. In 2025 alone, more than 60,000 electric bikes were sold, a figure that is expected to reach 100,000 by the year's end. Battery imports are projected to exceed 8 GWh by 2030. At the same time, the competitive electricity market reform promises to do away with decades of government monopoly on the grid, allowing bilateral trade between consumers and sellers. These are all basic components of a VPP.

In a competitive market, rooftop solar generators can pool their resources into VPPs and bid excess electricity into the market, offering not just energy but also grid services. Households and commercial units can become energy traders, promoting greater autonomy, consumer freedom, and decentralisation. People can inject cheap electricity into the grid in critical times through their batteries, or even by changing their consumption patterns, for example, by charging electric vehicles at night when the grid is underutilised.

> The solar energy revolution is both a crisis and an opportunity.

Globally there are many examples of successful VPP set-ups. One of the largest VPPs is operated by Next Kraftwerke in Europe, aggregating more than 12 GW of solar, wind and biogas capacity across multiple countries. Similarly, Australia's national VPP trials included around 7,000 households and demonstrated how home batteries could deliver reliable frequency control to stabilise the grid. These examples show that with the right incentives and digital infrastructure, even small-scale producers can collectively become a source of generation and reliability for the grid.

The solar energy revolution in Pakistan is both a crisis and an opportunity in disguise. If we continue to let things be, the burden on the lower economic classes will increase. However, if we tap into this new reservoir of renewable electricity through incentive-driven markets and flexible VPP set-ups, we can harness it as a stabilising force for the grid. Whether it becomes a disaster for vast segments of our society or a breakthrough for all depends on the choices we make now. ■

The writer is a public policy and energy expert pursuing doctoral studies at Lums.

FROM THE PAST PAGES OF DAWN

1975 | Fifty years ago

Palestinian rights

UNITED NATIONS: Warning that another Middle East war would throw the whole world into turmoil and disequilibrium Pakistan told the General Assembly … that unless the people of Palestine are afforded the possibility of national existence, there will be no lasting peace in the Middle East. In a speech … Ambassador Iqbal Akhund urged the entire membership to help … in building a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. Pointing to the volatile situation … he expressed the hope that the Assembly would act with ... foresight, and ... a sense of justice. To ignore the dictates of justice … is to reject peace. — News agencies

[Meanwhile, as reported by news agencies from Islamabad,] a Foreign Office spokesman ... characterised as a complete fabrication the "Hindustan Times" report … that "Pakistan has embarked on a massive plan to build Mirage jet-fighters … involving billions of dollars… ." The spokesman regretted that such a baseless story should have emanated from official Indian sources. He stated that the Prime Minister's visit to France was one of several such visits undertaken … to countries with which Pakistan enjoys … friendly relations.

1950 | Seventy-five years ago

Nepalese King flees

NEW DELHI: The Nepalese Embassy in Delhi tonight [Nov 7] announced that His Majesty the King of Nepal left the Palace on Nov 6 morning and took refuge in a "foreign Embassy", reports the [Press Trust of India]. The Government of Nepal later summoned an emergency session of the Nepalese Parliament, "Rajgurus and Bharadars" of the State to consider the situation. Meanwhile, the Nepalese Government have announced a three-year-old grandson of the Maharaja as the Ruler of Nepal amidst the "acclamation of the people".

Popular agitation for constitutional reforms in Nepal is believed to have a bearing on the Ruler of Nepal taking refuge in the Bharati Embassy in his Capital.

When the Prime Minister of Nepal, who is the virtual ruler, arrived in New Delhi early this year for talks for the Treaty between Bharat and Nepal concluded in July, he was advised by ... Bharat that the popular element in the State should be associated with the administration. The response to this friendly advice was apparently not encouraging. Agitation for self-government had been going on in the State for some years and many popular leaders had been put behind prison bars. — News agencies

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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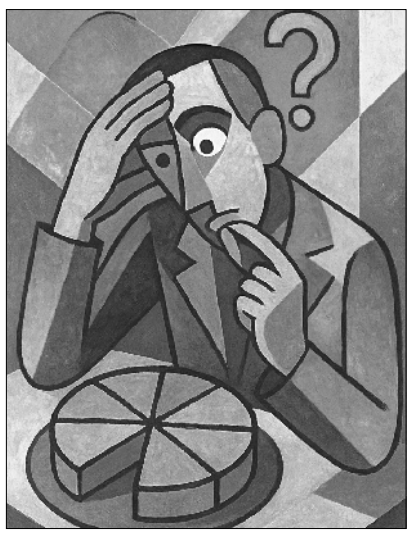
Letters may be edited for purposes of clarity and space. All letters should carry the writer's address, CNIC and phone numbers.



On their own, more units may not work

THE idea of creating new provinces in Pakistan has once again become a part of national discussion. Many people believe that smaller provinces could bring better governance and faster development, while others fear that such a move might deepen ethnic and political divisions. The debate is not new, and, surely, we are not having this debate for the last time either. It has become something of a national pastime in which we indulge in a cyclic pattern every few years.

Pakistan has often experimented with different administrative systems since its creation. In 1956, the government introduced the One Unit policy, which merged all the provinces of West Pakistan into one administrative unit to balance power with East Pakistan, which subsequently became Bangladesh.

However, that experiment failed badly. It ignored the cultural and linguistic diversity of the country, and smaller ethnic groups felt deprived of their rights. The resulting sense of alienation played a major role in the separation of East Pakistan in 1971.

The 18th Amendment of 2010 tried to correct that imbalance by giving more autonomy to the provinces. Now, with growing talk about the 27th Amendment, the question of creating new provinces has resurfaced. Supporters of this idea argue that smaller provinces would make administration more effective and responsive. For example, people in South Punjab often feel ignored by the Lahore-centred government of Punjab.

A separate province could ensure better allocation of funds, fair representation, and focused development in backward areas, they argue. The advocates also believe that local governments could pay attention to regional priorities, such as agriculture, industry or even tourism in line with the local needs rather than having to wait for decisions to be taken elsewhere.

However, critics point out several dangers. They argue that the demand for new provinces is often driven more by political interests than by genuine administrative needs. Politicians sometimes use such slogans to gain popularity and votes. Others warn that dividing provinces along ethnic or linguistic lines could encourage identity politics and weaken national unity.

Additionally, creating new provincial assemblies, governors and bureaucracies would require huge financial resources that the country can hardly afford at present.

History offers a clear lesson: too much centralisation leads to resentment, but careless division can also cause instability. Pakistan needs a balanced approach. Power should be decentralised where necessary, but without breaking national cohesion. Creating new provinces should not be seen as a political tool, but as a serious administrative reform aimed at improving governance and strengthening the federation.

If done transparently and with national consensus, it could help bring justice and development to neglected regions across the country. But, if done hastily or for political gain, it risks repeating the mistakes that once cost the country dearly.

Sanaullah Mirani
Daharki

Disaster in the making

QUETTA'S shifting weather patterns, declining water resources, and deteriorating environment are the hallmarks of a disaster that can no longer be ignored. Winters in Quetta used to mean weeks of snowfall.

Today, the snowfall is lighter and shorter, while summers are longer and hotter. Rain, too, has lost its rhythm. Instead of steady showers, the city now alternates between long dry spells and sudden, destructive downpours.

Agriculture, especially fruit orchards, long defined Quetta's economy and attraction, but that is no more the case because water supplies are shrinking. Groundwater levels are dropping, and farmers have been reporting declining yields. The water shortage is actually acute across the city. In many neighbourhoods, residents have to rely on water tankers, often queuing up for hours to secure supplies.

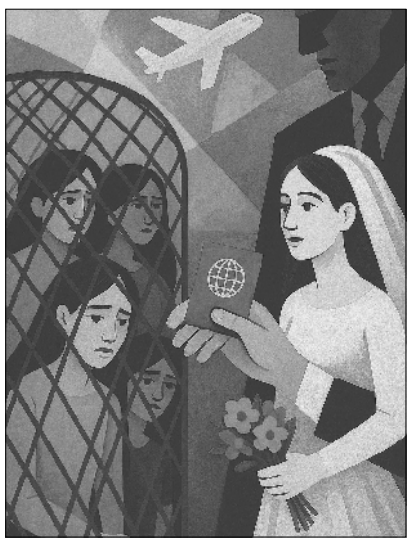
Climate change is also a public health concern. Heatwaves, dust storms and pollution have together increased the incidence of respiratory illnesses. The loss of green cover has made soil erosion worse, reduced natural water retention, and accelerated desertification.

Wildlife in the surrounding mountains is also under pressure. As resources go down and teh cost of living rises, many young people are leaving Quetta in search of opportunities elsewhere. This migration has weakened communities, leaving behind an ageing population to struggle to manage life somehow.

Quetta's climate disaster is no longer a distant threat; it is right here right now. The shrinking orchards, the dry taps, the vanishing snow, and the polluted air are all reminders of what is at stake. The responsibility lies with both the administration and the community. Time is running out, and action is needed more than ever.

Maheen Karim
Quetta

Child trafficking



CHILD trafficking is one of the most alarming forms of human exploitation. The Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, 2018, criminalises human trafficking and provides measures for prevention, protection and prosecution.

This law specifically aims at combatting the trafficking of women and children through effective national and international cooperation, ensuring strict penalties and rehabilitation mechanisms for victims. However, despite these legal tools, the issue remains severely neglected in certain areas, particularly in Lyari.

Disturbingly, young girls, some as young as 14, are being sent to Oman under the guise of marriage. Once abroad, their whereabouts often become unknown. Due to extreme poverty, many parents, driven by financial desperation, accept money from the traffickers, and unknowingly force their underage daughters into a life of exploitation.

These innocent girls, influenced by societal beliefs that marriage symbolises success, are unaware that they are stepping into a nightmare. Many become victims of sexual exploitation, forced labour or criminal activities, while others face lifelong trauma, depression and social isolation due to language and cultural barriers in foreign lands. This ongoing tragedy reflects deep social injustice and deception, as underprivileged and uneducated families fall prey to trafficking networks disguised as marriage brokers.

These children lose not only their safety and innocence, but their entire sense of identity and belonging. Therefore, it is imperative for the government to take immediate and firm action. Awareness campaigns must be launched to educate parents and communities about the reality behind such so-called marriages.

Law-enforcement agencies should dismantle these trafficking gangs, while strict collaboration with international organisations should be established to ensure the protection and repatriation of victims.

The children of Pakistan surely deserve justice, protection and the right to live their childhood free from any kind of exploitation. We have to act now before more young innocent lives are destroyed.

Hani Wahid Baloch
Karachi

Pathetic behaviour

WHILE travelling on the federal capital's Metro recently, I witnessed an incident that left me deeply disturbed. Two transgender individuals attempted to enter the women-and-children section, but were refused entry. When they moved to the general section, some male passengers mocked, laughed and harassed them openly. I was shocked at such intolerance, and it made me question where our society is headed and how easily we allow prejudice to humiliate fellow citizens.

Such treatment is in direct violation of constitutional guarantees. Unfortunately, widespread bias continues to exclude transgender citizens from mainstream society, forcing many into begging or dangerous, exploitative work. The absence of accountability further emboldens harassment and violence.

Transgender rights are enshrined in Pakistan's Constitution, reinforced by the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018. The Supreme Court's ruling in 2012 also guarantees their fundamental rights to education, healthcare and employment. But the gap between law and its execution often reveals a stark contrast.

We must ask ourselves if this, indeed, is the kind of society we want to be a part of; one that strips people of dignity and denies them their due rights.

It is time for both policymakers and the public at large to reflect rather seriously on the matter. Discriminatory practices must be rooted out, existing laws must be strictly enforced, and awareness campaigns must challenge ingrained social biases.

Faraz Dastageer
Islamabad

▶ **LAST GREEN COVER:** Karachi's fertile agricultural lands are being rapidly encroached upon and converted into housing schemes. This not only threatens the livelihoods of local farmers, but also undermines Karachi's ecological balance. The situation is worsening because of weak enforcement and alleged political patronage that allows landgrabbing to continue. People feel helpless as legal ownership is ignored, and communities are displaced without accountability. It is time authorities treated the issue with the seriousness it deserves. Protecting Malir's land is about safeguarding food security, environment and the basic rights of the people. The Sindh government should take action before Malir loses its heritage and Karachi loses its last green cover.
Azlina Razzak Baloch
Karachi

▶ **SAVING WATER:** Pakistan is rapidly heading towards a severe water crisis due to mismanagement, population growth and wastage. Many cities, including Islamabad and Karachi, face water scarcity as a matter of routine. If this issue is ignored, we may face droughts in the near future. The government should build new dams, repair old pipelines, and introduce awareness campaigns to encourage water conservation. People must also learn to use water wisely in homes, schools and industries. Water is our lifeline. Saving this blue gold today means protecting the future of the generations to come.
Amna Hassan
Islamabad

▶ **POLIO-RIDDEN BALOCHISTAN:** Polio remains a significant health issue in Balochistan. Many children have been left to live a life of disability. The government must prioritise polio vaccination efforts to protect future generations. We must ensure that all children actually receive the polio vaccine. This can be achieved by increasing mass awareness, improving healthcare infrastructure, and making the polio vaccine accessible to all children across the province. The relevant authorities should take immediate action in this regard, and work towards a polio-free Balochistan.
Homaitan Baloch
Gwadar

External Ombudsman

Veteran journalist Muhammad Ali Siddiqi is *Dawn's* External Ombudsman (DEO). His duty is to attend to our readers' complaints, and to respond to them professionally. DEO is the investigating authority to whom all complaints can be referred, and it is DEO who takes notice of any alleged violations of *Dawn's* code of ethics, and informs the Editor for appropriate action.
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